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Colorado Child Welfare Training Needs Assessment

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COLORADO TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE

Introduction

The Colorado Department of Human Services (CO DHS) has contracted with the Cutler Institute for Health and Social Policy to assess the professional development needs of child welfare caseworkers, case aides, and supervisors. This needs assessment will help guide the development of the new Child Welfare Training Academy established by Governor Bill Ritter in May 2009. The Academy will provide child welfare professionals across the state with the training, skills and knowledge to better protect the state's most vulnerable children from abuse and neglect.

To support this effort, a training needs survey was distributed to the 64 county offices to:

- ❖ Identify the High Priority Training Topics
- ❖ Explore Differences in Needs Among Positions
- ❖ Discover How Training Can Best Be Delivered

Survey Collection

The evaluation team from the Cutler Institute developed an online survey designed to collect information from child welfare staff about the training resources that would be most helpful to their work. The questions were modified from a similar survey that was currently under development in Kentucky by the Kent School of Social Work.

The survey link was disseminated by the Director of Children & Family Training to the directors of the 64 county offices. Directors were responsible for encouraging all caseworkers, case aides and supervisors to participate (estimated statewide total 2,400). All survey responses were anonymous. The survey was made available for staff to complete for approximately three weeks during the summer of 2009. Over 850 responses were received.

Acknowledgements

Much appreciation goes to the following individuals for their support:

- ❖ Arthur Atwell, Director, Children & Family Training, CO DHS
- ❖ Leslie Navarro, Training Coordinator, CO DHS
- ❖ Dr. Anita Barbee, Kent School of Social Work, Consultant
- ❖ All the Colorado County Directors who promoted the survey with their staff



Background of Survey Participants (n=850)

The majority of survey respondents were female and had either a bachelor's or a master's degree. Most were working as a child welfare caseworker (70%). The opinions expressed in the survey reflect a diverse range of experience levels with about 60% of the sample having more than 5 years experience in child welfare and about a quarter with two years or less.

Position in the county		Currently holding a valid social worker's license?	
Child Welfare Caseworker	70%	Yes	8%
Child Welfare Supervisor	21%	No	92%
Case Aide	9%		
Specialty		If yes, type of license	
Intake Child Protection	22%	LSW	14%
Ongoing Child Protection	27%	LCSW	73%
Intake Adolescent	2%	LCPC	10%
Ongoing Adolescent	9%	LMSW	2%
Generalist*	7%	Didn't specify	1%
Adoption	6%		
Foster Care	3%	Ethnicity/race of respondents	
Kinship Care	2%	African American	3%
Chafee	1%	American Indian/Alaska Native	1%
Other	21%	Asian/Pacific Islander	1%
		White/Caucasian	75%
		Hispanic/Latino	16%
		Multi-racial/Other	4%
Highest level of formal education		Age of respondents	
Bachelors level	56%	25 or younger	6%
Masters level	37%	26-35	37%
Doctorate level	1%	36-45	25%
Other	6%	46 or older	32%
Child welfare experience		Gender of respondents	
None	1%	Female	88%
Under 6 months	2%	Male	12%
6-11 months	5%		
1-2 years	15%		
3-5 years	20%		
6-10 years	23%		
11-15 years	16%		
Over 15 years	20%		



Author's Note: Totals do not add to 100% due to rounding

* A significant number of respondents selected their specialty as "other" and then self-identified as a "generalist" in the comment fields.

Position-Specific Findings

Respondents were asked to identify training topics that would be most helpful in improving their practice in their child welfare position. Comparing the ranks of supervisors, caseworkers and case aides, there were several areas of common interest. The following training topics appeared in the top ranks for all child welfare positions:

- ✓ Effectively Dealing with Resistant Clients
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse
- ✓ Mental Illness: Identification and Accessing Resources

In addition, some topics offered more appeal to certain positions than others. Supervisors reported a stronger interest in trainings on conflict negotiations, making effective use of medical and psychological reports and maximizing visitations. While there is much overlap between caseworkers and case aides, caseworkers showed a stronger interest in learning how to better deal with teenagers. Case aides reported stronger interest in learning about child development stages, dealing with domestic violence issues, and detecting physical abuse.

Top Ten Most Requested Topics By Position*		
Supervisors (n=180)	Caseworkers (n=593)	Case Aides (n=76)
1. Effectively Dealing with Resistant Clients (3.8)	1. Effectively Dealing with Resistant Clients (3.9)	1. Effectively Dealing with Resistant Clients (4.1)
2. Dealing with Signs of Maltreatment in Foster Homes (3.7)	2. Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.8)	2. Mental Illness: Identification and Accessing Resources (4.0)
3. Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.7)	3. Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.8)	3. Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.9)
4. Dealing with Caretakers Who Are Mentally Ill (3.7)	4. Dealing with Caretakers Who Are Mentally Ill (3.8)	4. Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.9)
5. Assessing Child Safety and Risk (3.7)	5. Dealing with Signs of Maltreatment in Foster Homes (3.7)	5. Substance Abuse: Identification and Accessing Resources (3.9)
6. Effective use of Medical and Psychological Reports (3.7)	6. Mental Illness: Identification and Accessing Resources (3.6)	6. Assessing Child Safety and Risk (3.9)
7. Mental Illness; Identification and Accessing Resources (3.6)	7. Effective use of Medical and Psychological Reports (3.6)	7. Stages of Child Development (3.8)
8. Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.6)	8. Dealing with Teens (3.6)	8. Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.8)
9. Conflict Negotiations (3.6)	9. Substance Abuse: Identification and Accessing Resources (3.5)	9. Domestic Violence: Identification and Accessing Resources (3.8)
10. Maximizing Visitations (3.5)	10. Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.5)	10. Detecting Physical Abuse (3.8)

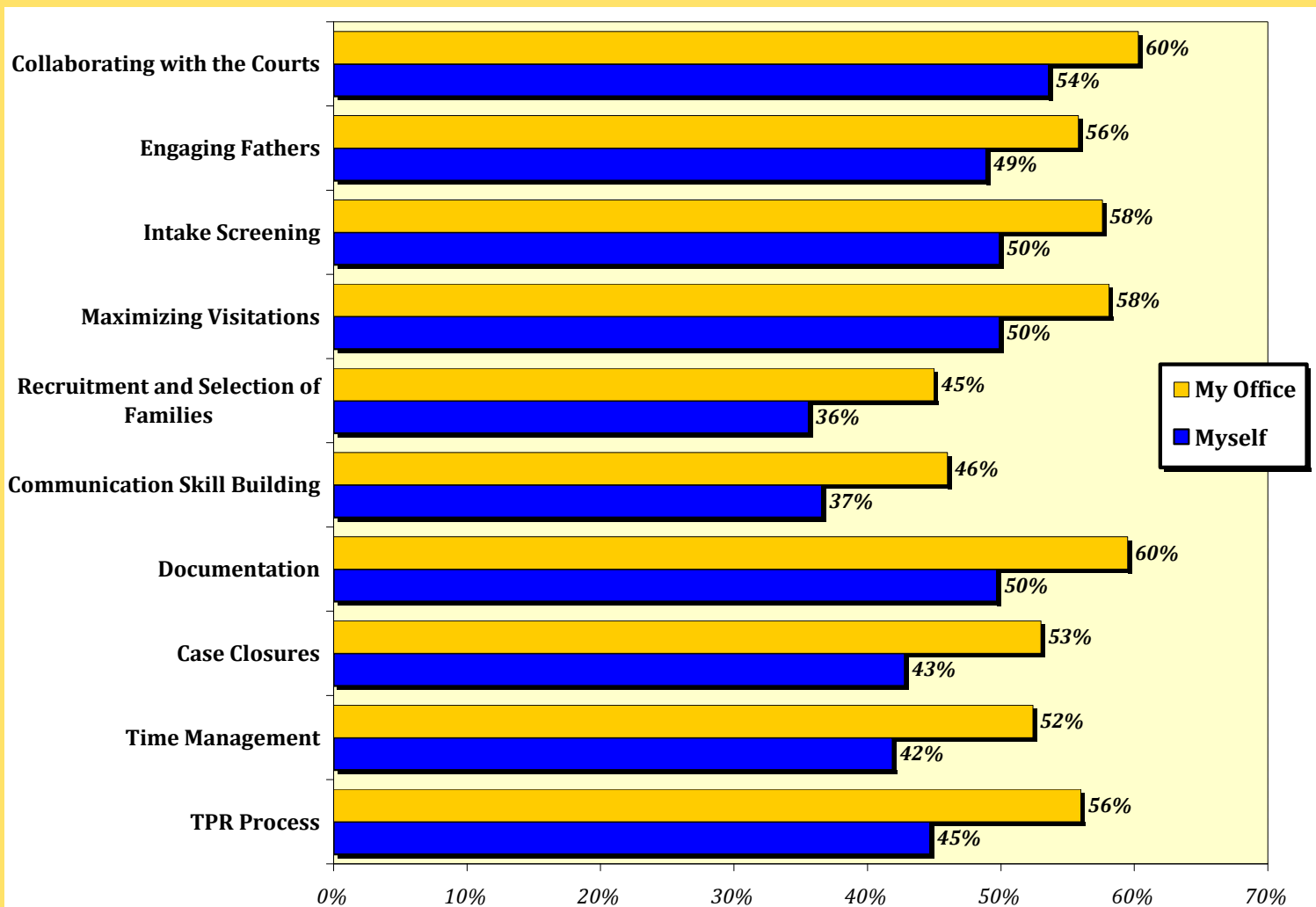
* Based on averages calculated from the Likert scale ratings: 1 (not at all helpful) – 5 (extremely helpful)

Perceived Differences in Training Needs

Respondents were asked to determine which of the forty training topics listed in the survey would be most helpful to their own child welfare practice and that of their office colleagues. In all areas of training but one, respondents ranked the training needs of their colleagues to be significantly more serious than their own training needs ($p < .05$). The one exception to this trend was in the area of conflict negotiations in which respondents ranked their own needs and those of their colleagues to be similar.

The figure below illustrates the percentage of respondents who believed the training topic would be helpful/very helpful either for their own practice or for those in their office. These ten areas represent where the largest discrepancies occurred. A detailed summary of the results for all training topics can be found in the appendix of this report.

Training Areas with Greatest Perceived Discrepancy Between Individual and Office Needs*



* Respondents selecting "4" or "5" on the Likert scale: 1 (not at all helpful) – 5 (extremely helpful).

Additional Training Topics

Many of the survey respondents took the time to share additional thoughts and comments on the survey items. Overall, we received 340 comments in the open-ended comment fields that were provided throughout the survey. Embedded in these comments were additional suggestions for training topics that were not addressed in the original survey questions. These are listed below for further consideration.

Suggestions for Future Trainings from Respondents' Comments*:	
Self-defense/Safety Training*	Comprehensive Fatality Investigation Training
Team Building/Improving Relations with Colleagues*	Risk Management
Working with Families With Special Needs Children (ex. FASD, DD, Autism)*	Supervising Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused
How to Effectively Motivate Colleagues/Caseworkers*	How to Complete a Good Social History
Dealing with Parents/Children of Methamphetamine Users*	Understanding Education Laws and School Policies
Anger/Stress Management for Child Welfare Professionals*	High Level Training on Dual Diagnosis Issues
Effective Ways to Deal with Gangs*	Tailored Trainings for the Needs of the Rural Generalist
Trainings on Changes in TRAILS*	Presentations Made By Local Community Providers About Their Services
How to Detect When Someone Is Under The Influence of Drugs/ETOH	Understanding and Assessing the Use of MH medications

In addition, respondents provided many comments related to cultural competency trainings. This proved to be an area of some debate among child welfare professionals. Some felt this area required more advanced training while others thought the topic was already well-covered at the expense of other issues. A sample of quotes reflecting both sides are shared below:

Additional Cultural Competency Training Is Needed

“Cultural competency in a safe zone where questions and stereotypes can be discussed without [fear of] being offensive to others”

“Advanced cultural competency training would be beneficial”

“More diversity training”

Cultural Competency Training Is NOT Needed

“There has already been too much training on cultural awareness”

“We live in a fairly homogeneous community...cultural variations are rare...”

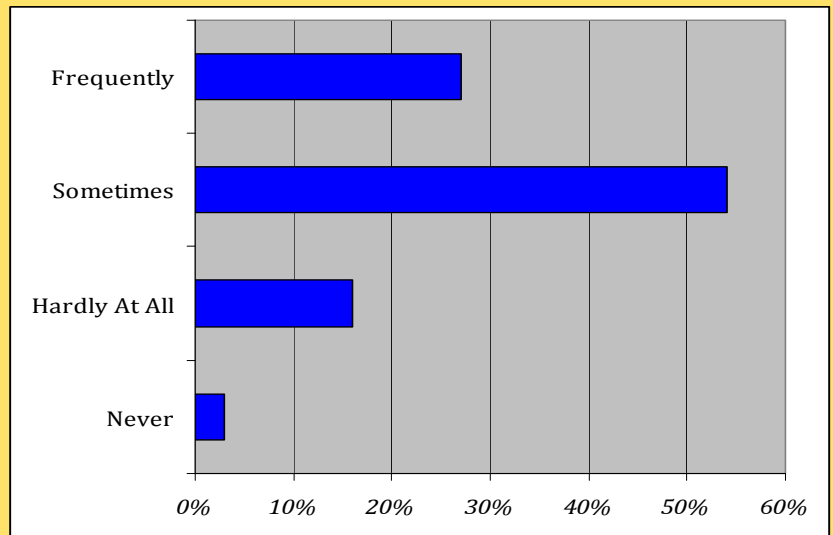
“[I] was unimpressed with a recent [cultural competency] training...”

* Denotes there was a high number of comments related to the topic

Training and Supervision

Question: *How often did respondents discuss their training needs with their supervisor?*

Answer: While a large majority reported they frequently or sometimes communicated with their supervisor about their training needs, almost 20% (158 respondents) did not. There were similarities in these reports among caseworkers, case aides and supervisors.



Recurring Themes in the Respondents' Comments:

Mixed Satisfaction with Supervisor Communication

"My supervisor...is supportive when discussing identified areas for my professional growth"

"The supervisor only gets involved if there are deficiencies..."

Need for More Structured Communication with Supervisor

"I could probably not go to a training for years without [supervisor] knowing."

Concerns over Training Simplicity

"Most training seems to be at the basic level... and does not progress to something more advanced."

"Offer [new] trainings that [are] not geared at new workers - who have limited experience"

Tailor Training to the Person's Position/Specialty

"There are... many [mandatory] trainings... that do not necessarily pertain to our job functions."

"Offer training that actually pertains to our jobs"

Preference for Regional Trainings

"More regionally developed trainings will make it easier to attend"

"Smaller and more rural counties lack in training...more regional trainings...might lessen this problem."

Perceived Lack of Training Resources

"There is rarely anything new to attend..."

"Usually we assume we have no funds for trainings so we don't discuss it"

Concerns over Training Consistency

"There needs to be a better system of doing things more consistently"

"It would be nice to have more structure in how new caseworkers are trained"

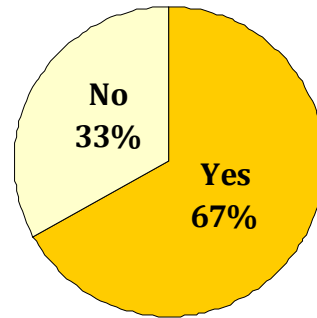
Suggestions for Mandatory Training Hours

"I would like to see 8 to 12 hrs. [of] mandatory training per year."

Webinar Training

Question: *Would you be interested in receiving some of your training through Webinar? (n=798)*

Answer: *67% answered that they **would** be interested in receiving some of their training through Webinar. 33% answered that they **would not** be interested in receiving some of their training through Webinar.*



Recurring Themes in the Respondents' Comments:

Interaction/Face-To-Face Time Is Key

"I am a social worker and enjoy learning in a group of real people not sitting at my desk."

"I am hearing impaired and need to be in the presence of the trainer."

"I personally do best with trainings I attend in person."

"I think trainings need to be in person and interactive. Over the computer does not allow for personal interaction and connection."

"Trainings via web or otherwise tend to be un-engaging and hard to follow/participate."

"Webinars would also serve well but not as an exclusive form of training as interaction is also key to growth."

Remote Access/Convenience/No Travel Time Are Beneficial

"Webinars would be great. . .travel time takes us out of the office and makes attending trainings difficult."

"Web trainings would be very beneficial for our staff due to location, weather, and travel hardships."

"I like the idea of webinar to facilitate less travel and more time to devote to the workload."

"Any kind of training that is available in a convenient format and delivery system would be great."

Training At Your Desk Can Be Distracting To Myself And Others

"I think webinar would be difficult to participate in while sitting in a cubicle. It would be distracting to those sitting around me - and it would be difficult not to get pulled into work related issues sitting at my desk where my clients could call or email me."

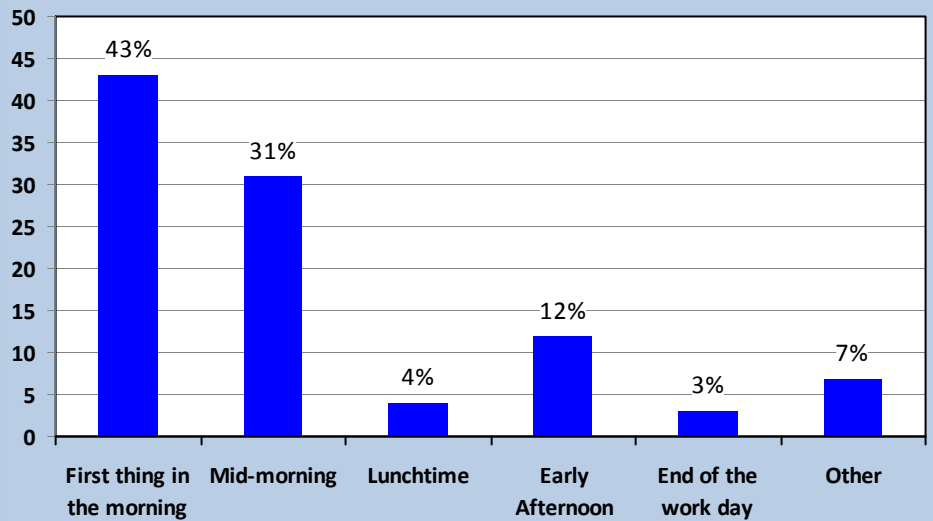
"If I were at my desk training, I would be impatient to do work instead and preoccupied with those thoughts".

"I wondered if [Webinar] might be a distraction to workers around me. Also, the work environment could distract me from being able to actively participate and learn the information presented."

Webinar Training (continued)

Question: *What times would you prefer that this be offered?*

Answer: *Close to 75% of the respondents that are interested in Webinar trainings would like to have it offered in the morning before lunchtime.*



Recurring Themes in the Respondents' Comments:

Schedules Vary, People Need Flexibility

"While training over the web can be good, for those of us with varying schedules, it is nearly impossible to find a time to do so."

"Days and times vary as intake revolves...some days you are working [on] new cases and others you are filling [in] on new cases, so there would have to be flexibility with days/times."

"I can adjust my schedule as long as I know well in advance."

"It would be nice if [Webinar training] occurred at several times."



Summary of Webinar Findings

The majority of child welfare staff (67%) were receptive to the idea of using a webinar training format – at least as a supplement to in-person trainings. Supporters stressed the convenience and reductions in travel time. However, there was a sizeable contingent (33%) who was resistant to the webinar format and would prefer in-person trainings. Comments revealed that concerns about webinars ranged from differences in learning styles to logistical barriers. If webinars are to be pursued, it is clear from the survey results that early mornings would be the preferred time.

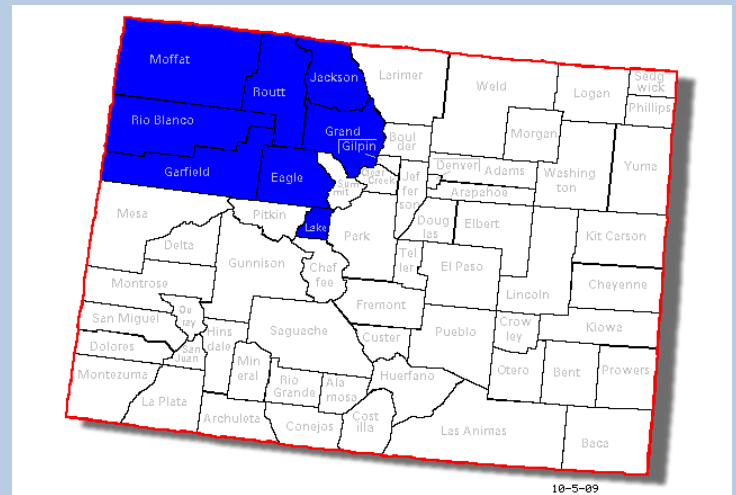
Responses were further examined by geographic location to determine if training needs vary significantly across the state. Responses were first coded by the county location self-reported by the respondents*. Counties were then organized into regions, based on pre-existing field administration service areas. Each map highlights the counties included in each region.

Region 1

# Respondents:	37
% Interested in Webinar:	86%

Highest Rated Training Topics:

- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (4.3)
- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (4.2)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (4.2)
- ✓ Dealing with Teens (4.1)
- ✓ TPR Process (4.0)
- ✓ Enhancing Interviewing (4.0)
- ✓ Assessing Child Safety/Risk (4.0)
- ✓ Kinship Care (3.9)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Foster Home Maltreatment (3.9)
- ✓ Maximizing Visitations (3.9)

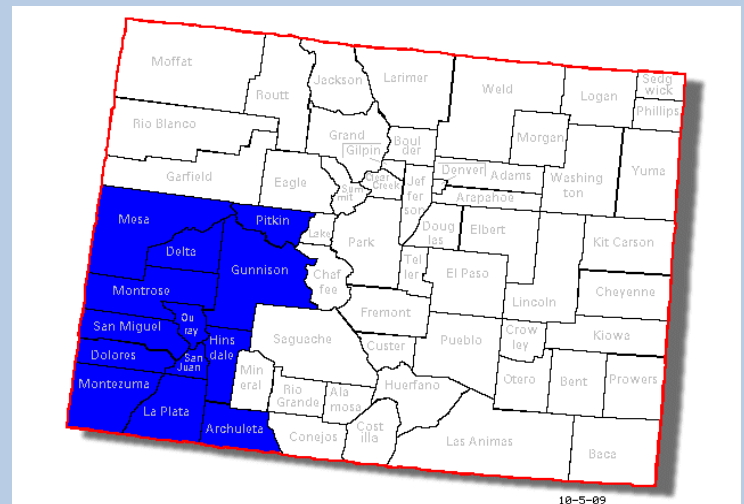


Region 2

# Respondents:	54
% Interested in Webinar:	80%

Highest Rated Training Topics:

- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (4.0)
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.9)
- ✓ Conflict Negotiations (3.7)
- ✓ Enhancing Documentation (3.6)
- ✓ Intake Screening (3.6)
- ✓ Dealing with Teens (3.6)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.6)
- ✓ Collaborating with Courts (3.6)
- ✓ Mental Illness (3.6)
- ✓ Effective Use Medical/Psych. Reports (3.6)

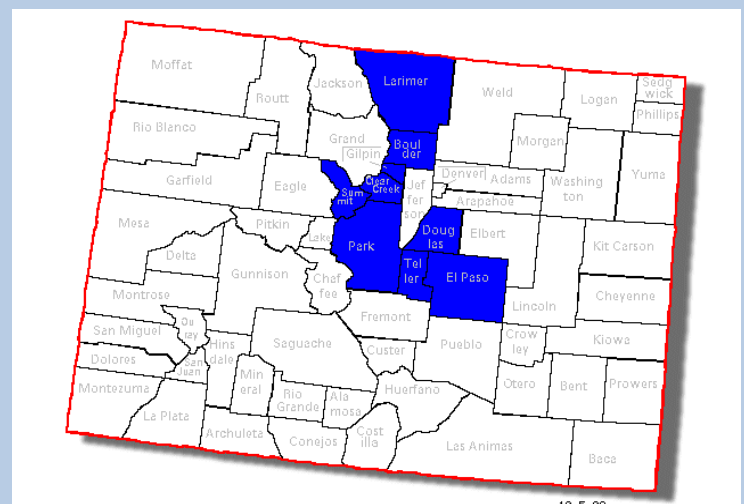


Region 3

# Respondents:	208
% Interested in Webinar:	69%

Highest Rated Training Topics:

- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (3.9)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Mentally Ill Caretakers (3.9)
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.8)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.8)
- ✓ Mental Illness (3.7)
- ✓ Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.6)
- ✓ Substance Abuse (3.6)
- ✓ Assessing Child Safety/Risk (3.6)
- ✓ Domestic Violence (3.6)



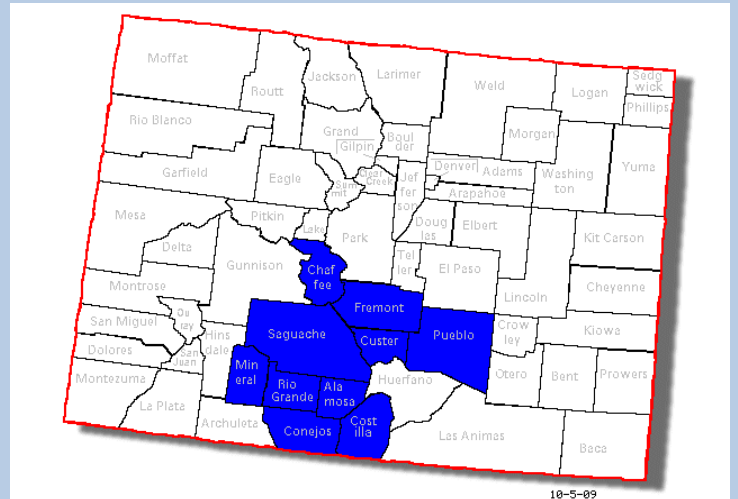
* Respondents were asked to report their county of residence. In most instances, respondents live and work in the same region.

Regional Variation (continued)

Region 4

Respondents: 89
% Interested in Webinar: 52%
Highest Rated Training Topics:

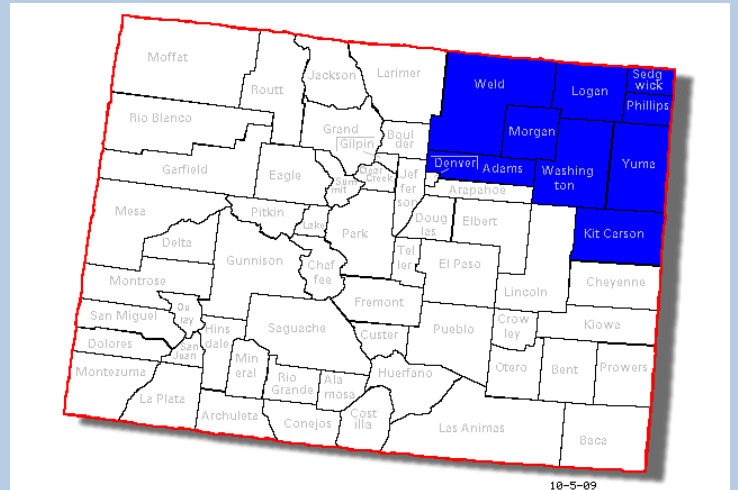
- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (4.1)
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.9)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Mentally Ill Caretakers (3.9)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Foster Home Maltreatment (3.9)
- ✓ Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.9)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.9)
- ✓ Kinship Care (3.8)
- ✓ Mental Illness (3.7)
- ✓ Intake Screening (3.7)
- ✓ Effective Interactions w/ Foster Families (3.7)



Region 5

Respondents: 160
% Interested in Webinar: 72%
Highest Rated Training Topics:

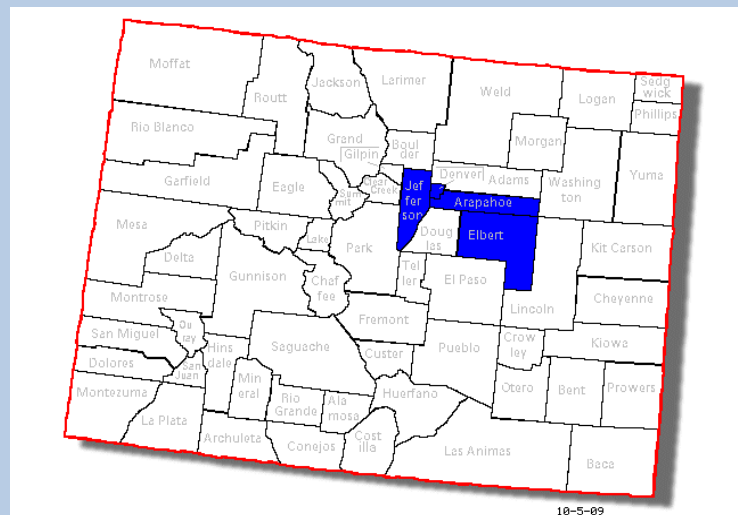
- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (3.9)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.8)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Foster Home Maltreatment (3.7)
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.7)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Mentally Ill Caretakers (3.6)
- ✓ Mental Illness (3.6)
- ✓ Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.6)
- ✓ Substance Abuse (3.6)
- ✓ Conflict Negotiations (3.5)
- ✓ Stages of Early Childhood Development (3.5)



Region 6

Respondents: 240
% Interested in Webinar: 58%
Highest Rated Training Topics:

- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (3.8)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Mentally Ill Caretakers (3.8)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.7)
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.7)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Foster Home Maltreatment (3.7)
- ✓ Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.9)
- ✓ Mental Illness (3.7)
- ✓ Dealing with Teens (3.6)
- ✓ Assessing Child Safety/Risk (3.6)
- ✓ Working with Siblings (3.5)
- ✓ Collaborating with Courts (3.5)



Regional Variation (continued)

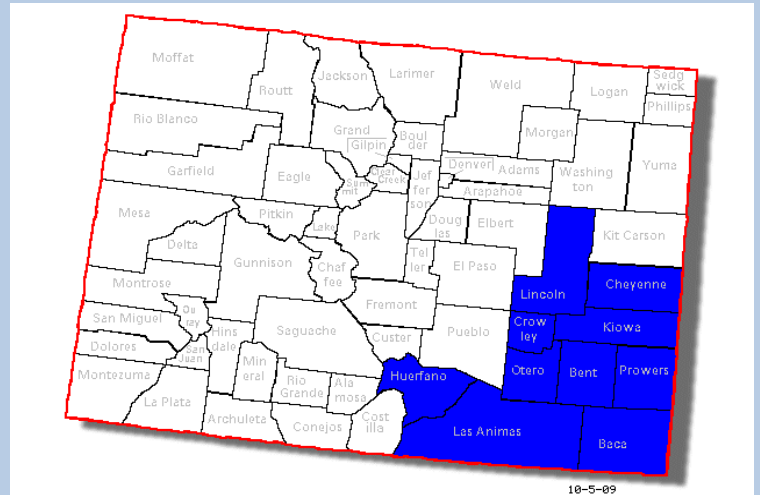
Region 7

Respondents: 44

% Interested in Webinar: 83%

Highest Rated Training Topics:

- ✓ Dealing with Resistant Clients (4.1)
- ✓ Detecting Emotional Abuse (3.9)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Mentally Ill Caretakers (3.9)
- ✓ Dealing w/ Foster Home Maltreatment (3.9)
- ✓ Enhancing Interviewing Skills (3.9)
- ✓ Detecting Sexual Abuse (3.9)
- ✓ Kinship Care (3.8)
- ✓ Mental Illness (3.7)
- ✓ Intake Screening (3.7)
- ✓ Effective Interactions w/ Foster Families (3.7)



Summary of Regional Differences

Our analysis indicates that there are distinct training preferences based on geographic location. Levels of interest in webinar training formats varied significantly by region. Additionally, some regions rated some topics to be more helpful to improving their child welfare practice than others. While these differences are interesting, readers should be cautious in the interpretation of regional differences. Participation levels in the survey also varied by region. Since response rates varied by county, survey results for some regions may be more representative of staff who work in that geographic area than the results from other regions.



Conclusions and Next Steps

Over 850 child welfare professionals responded to the online survey on professional development needs (35% of the estimated workforce). Across the sample, there were some recurring themes that emerged in the analyses. The majority of respondents ranked the following topics to be helpful to their own professional development and also to the child welfare professionals they work with:

- ❖ Dealing with Resistant Clients
- ❖ Detecting Emotional Abuse
- ❖ Detecting Sexual Abuse
- ❖ Dealing with Mentally Ill Caretakers
- ❖ Dealing with Maltreatment in Foster Homes
- ❖ Mental Illness: Identification and Resources
- ❖ Enhancing Interviewing Skills
- ❖ Substance Abuse: Identification and Resources
- ❖ Use of Psychological and Medical Reports
- ❖ Collaborating with the Courts
- ❖ Assessing Child Risk and Safety
- ❖ Dealing with Teens

No matter how the data was examined, the topics listed above repeatedly received some of the highest rankings. However, we also received suggestions for new topics that were not included on the original survey. Some of the most frequently suggested topics included: anger management and self defense training for child welfare professionals; instruction on how to deal with gangs and methamphetamine use; and best practices for dealing with families who have special needs children. The Division of Children & Family Training may need to explore if these topics would also appeal to a broader audience.

The survey results not only revealed the overall level of interest in the training topics but also suggest several considerations that should be taken into account before the training program is developed:

1. Respondents frequently cited concerns that the trainings that would be developed would be geared for new caseworkers or would only be offered at an introductory level. Many commented on the need for more advanced trainings, in which experienced professionals could more fully explore the day-to-day challenges they experience with these issues. The Division of Children & Family Training should further develop these topic areas with a working group or representative committee to ensure that trainings are developed at multiple levels.
2. The survey results did indicate that the level of interest in each topic also varies by the person's child welfare position (i.e. supervisor, caseworker, or case aide) and geographic location. Trainings may need to be geared towards the interests of particular sub-groups.
3. The format of the training program should be flexible. Some respondents were excited by the prospect of Webinar participation. Others preferred a traditional hands-on approach. The Division of Children & Family Training should consider whether some topics are best suited to a particular presentation format or both. Clearly, a one-size-fits-all approach to training would isolate some of the child welfare workers.

Lastly, it should be noted that these findings reflect self-reported needs as perceived by the supervisors, caseworkers and case aides. They do not necessarily reflect the policy priorities of administrators who may be seeking to move their department in a new direction and who might assess needs using a different yardstick. There may be a need to include these priority areas in addition to those topics which received a high ranking in this survey.

Overall, there was a high level of interest in new professional development opportunities among Colorado's child welfare workforce. The high number of survey respondents and voluntary comments that we received suggest that the efforts to expand training will be greatly appreciated. Across the state, supervisors, caseworkers and case aides expressed a desire to hone their skills in service to their commitment to children and families.

Appendix

The following table details the percentage of respondents who believed training on each topic listed in the survey would be helpful/very helpful to themselves or to the child welfare staff in their office:

Percent Respondents Reporting Training Would Be Helpful/Very Helpful					
Topic	Myself	My Office	Topic	Myself	My Office
Dealing with Resistant Clients	70%	75%	TPR Process	45%	56%
Detecting Emotional Abuse	65%	69%	Engaging Fathers	49%	56%
Detecting Sexual Abuse	65%	68%	Detecting Physical Abuse	50%	54%
Dealing with Mentally Ill Caretakers	64%	68%	Stages of Child Development	50%	54%
Dealing with Maltreatment in Foster Homes	62%	64%	Case Closures (how to clean-up your caseload)	43%	53%
Mental Illness: Identification and Resources	59%	64%	Personal Health and Safety	47%	53%
Enhancing Interviewing Skills	57%	61%	Time Management	42%	52%
Substance Abuse: Identification and Resources	56%	61%	Assessment and Referral of Infants/Toddlers	46%	52%
Use of Psychological and Medical Reports	56%	61%	Cultural Competency	48%	51%
Collaborating with the Courts	54%	60%	Understanding Funding Sources	49%	51%
Assessing Child Risk and Safety	55%	60%	Placement Authority	47%	51%
Dealing with Teens	55%	60%	Collaborating with School Systems	44%	51%
Documentation	50%	60%	Addressing Educational Needs	46%	50%
Maximizing Visitations	50%	58%	Placement of Children Across State Lines	46%	50%
Intake Screening	50%	58%	Working with Community Partners in Family Team Meetings	43%	49%
Domestic Violence: Identification and Resources	53%	57%	Adoption Process	42%	46%
Working with Siblings	52%	57%	Communication Skill Building	37%	46%
Conflict Negotiations	56%	56%	Recruitment and Selection of Foster/Adoption Families	36%	45%
Effective Interactions with Foster Families	50%	56%	Being a Good Public Relations Agent	36%	42%
Kinship Care	51%	56%	Navigating Management Information Systems	37%	39%